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HOW TO... Record a podcast with Audacity

It's easy to record a podcast, and cheaper than you may think. Tom Gorham explains how to make your first recordings

You don't need high-end audio equipment to begin podcasting. With a cheap microphone and a copy of Audacity's free audio-editing software (from this month's DVD or <http://audacity.sourceforge.net>), you can create an audio track that others will be able to download and listen to on their iPod or MP3 player. Here we show you how to get started.

1 Check your microphone is selected as the recording source in Audacity. Under the Audio I/O tab in Audacity's Preferences window, make sure your microphone is chosen for recording. Select the Mono channel to reduce file size.

Under the Quality tab, you need to choose 44,100 as the default sample rate – this is high-enough quality for a spoken word podcast. Under the File Formats tab, select MP3 as the Export format.

2 To test your recording settings, click on Audacity's microphone icon to turn on volume metering and talk into your microphone. Ideally, as you talk, you want the level to go towards the right of the meter without going fully red, which indicates audio distortion. If distortion occurs, adjust the volume of your microphone in Audacity's mixed toolbar, just below the program's recording controls.

3 Click on the red Record button and start recording your track. Once you've completed your recording, you can edit the results to remove pauses and unwanted audio effects. With the Selection Tool active in the Edit toolbar, click and drag over an area of the track you want to remove.

To check your selection is accurate, press the space bar to hear the audio contained in this clip. To remove it, select Cut from the Edit menu.

4 When you've finished editing, save your audio file. To distribute it, you'll need to upload it to a web server and create an RSS podcast feed for it. This is a simple descriptive text file that allows people to subscribe to your podcast through iTunes or other podcast-capable programs.

You can create your own podcast feed file from scratch, but it's easier to use a utility. Enter your file's details at www.tdscripits.com/webmaster_utilities/podcast-generator.php. It will generate text that you can paste into a plain-text file. Save the file, with an '.xml' extension, in the same directory as your audio file.

You can place a link to this podcast feed file on your website or blog, or use it when you list your podcast in iTunes' podcast directory. The directory can be found under the Podcasts genre in the iTunes Store. **CS**

